

The clouds are black. The winds shriek and shrill. The rain blows horizontal as the waves grow into fluid mountains relentlessly collapsing only to build again. Ships creak and roll regularly navigating these treacherous waters. There are two types of sailors, it is said. Those who have faced a storm and those who will. It is an inevitable part of life on the sea. As it is an inevitable part of life.

Considering the recent hurricanes, both natural and man-made, I find myself reflecting on ballast. And how ships improve their odds of riding out these storms. "The most dangerous ship in a hurricane is an empty one," said one captain. Ballast helps a ship remain stable so it can weather even the most capricious storms. Ballast is created by adding weight--like sea water, heavy cargo or cement.

But how do we give ballast to our children, our friends and our communities so they don't capsize? How do we help navigate life's treacherous storms so they don't feel empty, alone – wrecked and helpless in the churning seas. What does spiritual and emotional ballast look like? The storms are inevitable.

We provide ballast through acts of love, through acts of solidarity and through active support. It means not waiting for the SOS. It is not for us to judge the strength and destructive potential of someone else's storm. We can't always see the clouds darkening – the storm gathering.

Telling someone you love them is necessary but not sufficient. Ballast in the emotional and spiritual sense is a verb not a noun. It is showing up, standing up and walking with. It is saying, "Here I am. You are not alone. I see you." The tradition teaches upon each of our hearts God engraves the word "love." Over the course of the year the engraving gets covered with grit and dirt until the word is lost.

We must actively clean off that grime and remember we are here on this earth to give freely of our love. And to make that love felt – to say, "Here I am." Indeed, the strength, the ballast of that love may be stronger than any storm. And with that strength we provide perhaps the greatest gift -- the freedom to fearlessly explore life's boundless seas.